

Mongol empire, [empire](#) founded by [Genghis Khan](#) in 1206. Originating from the [Mongol](#) heartland in the [Steppe](#) of central [Asia](#), by the late 13th century it spanned from the [Pacific Ocean](#) in the east to the [Danube River](#) and the shores of the [Persian Gulf](#) in the west. At its peak, it covered some 9 million square miles (23 million square km) of territory, making it the largest [contiguous](#) land empire in [world history](#)

The year 1206, when Temüjin, son of Yesügei, was elected Genghis Khan of a federation of tribes on the banks of the Onon River, must be regarded as the beginning of the Mongol empire. This federation not only consisted of Mongols in the proper sense—that is, [Mongol-speaking](#) tribes—but also other [Turkic](#) tribes. Before 1206 Genghis Khan was but one of the tribal leaders fighting for supremacy in the steppe regions south and southeast of [Lake Baikal](#); his victories over the Kereit and then the Naiman Turks, however, gave him undisputed authority over the whole of what is now [Mongolia](#). A series of campaigns, some of them carried out simultaneously, followed.

The first attack (1205–09) was directed against the [Tangut](#) kingdom of Hsi Hsia ([Xi Xia](#)), a northwestern border-state of [China](#), and ended in a declaration of [allegiance](#) by the Xi Xia king. A subsequent campaign was aimed at north China, which at that time was ruled by the Tungusic [Jin dynasty](#). The fall of [Beijing](#) in 1215 marked the loss of all the territory north of the [Huang He](#) (Yellow River) to the Mongols; during the following years the Jin empire was reduced to the role of a buffer state between the Mongols in the north and the Chinese [Song empire](#) in the south. Other campaigns were launched against central Asia. In 1218 the Khara-Khitai state in east [Turkistan](#) was absorbed into the empire.

The assassination of [Muslim](#) subjects of Genghis Khan by the Khwārezmians in Otrar led to a war with the sultanate of [Khwārezm](#) (Khiva) in west Turkistan (1219–25). [Bukhara](#), [Samarkand](#), and the capital [Urgench](#) were taken and

sacked by Mongol armies (1220–21). Advance troops (after crossing the [Caucasus](#)) even penetrated into southern [Russia](#) and raided cities in [Crimea](#) (1223). The once prosperous region of Khwārezm suffered for centuries from the effects of the Mongol invasion which brought about not only the destruction of the prosperous towns but also the disintegration of the [irrigation system](#) on which agriculture in those parts depended. A similarly destructive campaign was launched against Xi Xia in 1226–27 because the Xi Xia king had refused to assist the Mongols in their expedition against Khwārezm. The death of Genghis Khan during that campaign (1227) increased the vindictiveness of the Mongols. The Xi Xia [culture](#), a mixture of Chinese and Tibetan elements, with [Buddhism](#) as the state [religion](#), was virtually [annihilated](#).

In 1227 the Mongol dominions stretched over the vast regions between the [Caspian](#) and [China](#) seas, bordering in the north on the sparsely populated forest belt of [Siberia](#) and in the south on the [Pamirs](#), [Tibet](#), and the central plains of China. This empire contained a multitude of different peoples, religions, and civilizations, and it is only natural to seek the motivating force behind this unparalleled expansion. Certainly the traditional antagonism between pastoral, nomadic steppe-dwellers and settled agricultural civilizations has to be taken into account. Raids by nomads from the steppe had always occurred from time to time wherever powerful nomadic tribes lived in the proximity of settled populations, but they had not usually taken on the dimensions of a bid for world [hegemony](#) or domination as in the case of Genghis Khan's invasions.